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A SPARK DIVINE
A Book for Animal-Lovers

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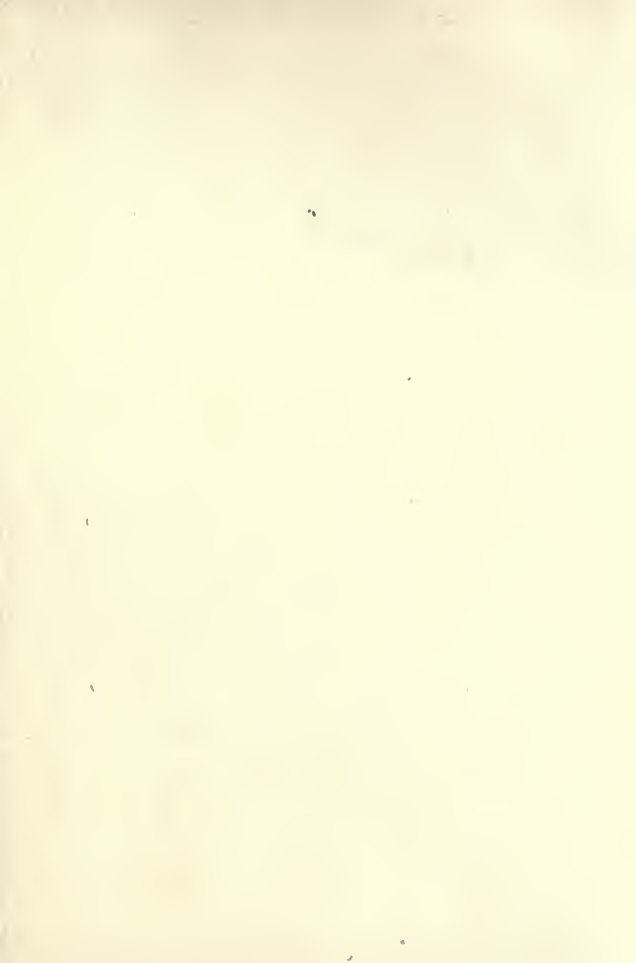
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FELLOWSHIP BOOKS

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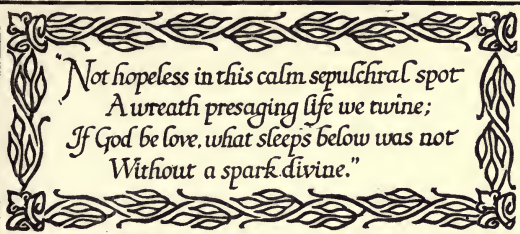
A SPARK DIVINE

A Book for Animal-Lovers

A SPARK DIVINE
A Book for Animal-Lovers
By R. C. Lehmann



Published by B. T. Batsford, London



*"Not hopeless in this calm sepulchral spot
A wreath presaging life we twine;
If God be love, what sleeps below was not
Without a spark divine."*

I. THE TAIL-WAGGERS

AS man wanders from darkness to darkness through his appointed tract of life there lie about his path, for cheer and consolation, many friendships and affections ready to answer to his own desire and to bind themselves round his heart. He has his mother's love, which is interfused with pride, as of one who should say, "Other men are well enough and other women, doubtless, do the best they can; but behold this paragon! Am I not exalted among women for having given him birth?" He has his father's love, which does not preclude advice and censure; and the love of his brothers

and sisters, which is sharpened by the knowledge of his vulnerable points and tempered by the will to use that knowledge. There is the love of children, which passes with time into respect or acquiescence, and there is the love of his friends, which does not exempt him from their improving criticism. But if, as is possible, he desires a love that never falters and never questions, that misuse cannot change and even cruelty cannot affect; if he is attracted by a loyalty which rises into worship and flatters poor human nature by investing it with godlike attributes; if his complex and doubting mind cares to refresh itself with the contemplation of perfect simplicity and directness; if he sighs for a companionship which will assume the burden of his faults and almost turn them into virtues, which contents itself with a kind look or a cheering word and does not even press for these—if these be his wishes, he can secure them, almost without an effort on his own part, from the proffered love of the four-footed beasts

who humbly follow his footsteps through the world. Much of his happiness will depend on his acceptance of the gift and on the manner in which he treats it when it is his.

☞ How, then, shall we make the most of these friends? Some men seem to think they have done all that is necessary when they have given a dog a kennel in a yard and have attached him to a chain as a preventive against burglars and an ineffectual terror to butcher-boys. It is pitiful to hear the poor beast barking his throat to bits and to see him wasting all his noble qualities and wearing his great soul away under a mask of carefully cultivated ferocity. Others again look upon their cats as mere mousers, reject their reticent and comfortable friendship, and banish them to kitchens and larders and the cold hospitality of passages. This may, no doubt, temporarily gratify the cat, but think what is lost in giving play only to one part (and that the murderous one) of her otherwise amiable nature. No, let us have none of this.

Let us, on the contrary (with due reservations and precautions in regard to long-haired dogs and muddy weather), assert and practise the principle that if we are to get the utmost good and the keenest pleasure out of our association with animals we must give them the right to share our working hours as well as our leisure, to occupy our house and room as well as to accompany us in our walks. Thus they will learn from us lessons mainly tending to elevate a carpet into a position of inviolable sanctity, and we shall be taught by them how easy it is (for a dog) to be loyal and friendly and faithful, and (for a cat) to be proud without ostentation and affectionate without servility.

*Docta per incertas audax discurrere silvas
collibus hirsutas atque agitare feras,
non gravibus vinclis unquam consueta teneri
verbera nec niveo corpore saeva pati.
molli namque sinu domini dominaeque jacebam
et noram in strato lassa cubare toro.*

The unknown who, more than sixteen hundred years ago, had these lines engraved on the little marble tomb of his dog Margaret knew the dog-lover's secret as well as any man.

☞ Imagination, no doubt, may please itself by straying to a future in which the framework of civilization shall have been enlarged and its implements strengthened so that it may be possible for you to admit to your hearth Prince, the elephant, or Mamie, the giraffe. "John," you will say, "have you let Prinny out for his morning run? Oh yes, here he comes with a poplar in his trunk. Down, Prinny, down! You're covering me with mud. Come in to breakfast and have your bun." Or: "Mamie, get off the sofa at once. Sofas are not meant for giraffes. Besides, you've got your own basket in the corner. Naughty, naughty Mamie!" Something of this kind seems, if we may believe Milton, to have been the lot (not indoors, but in the open) of our first parents:

*About them frisking played
All beasts of the earth since wild, and of all
chase
In wood or wilderness, forest or den ;
Sporting the lion ramped, and in his paw
Dandled the kid ; bears, tigers, ounces, pards,
Gambolled before them ; the unwieldy elephant,
To make them mirth, used all his might, and
wreathed
His lithe proboscis.*

☞ It is a pity that no mention is made of the hippopotamus. Many of us have always felt singularly drawn to this genial monster who has the remarkable merit of being at the same time supremely massive and (when he opens his mouth) undeniably hollow. Good humour shines in every square yard of his face, and his kindness of heart is so great that he could hardly bring himself to tread on your foot, certainly not without the apology that any gentleman gladly grants to another whom he has unwittingly injured or offended. His bill

for rice might be large, but think what a joy it would be to take him out with you in the country lanes and to see him speeding, as he unquestionably would, in headlong flight from the anger of a Pomeranian dog to whom he had ventured to make unsolicited advances. In his off moments he might make himself useful as a substitute for the steam-roller on newly mended roads.

☞ These are agreeable fancies, but in the meantime fate and the size and frailty of our homes limit us for the most part to dogs and cats. Some, no doubt, will put forward the mongoose and the jerboa as amiable companions, but these, delightful though they may be, are exotics beyond the attainment of the general. It is not everybody who can secure or keep a supply of snakes sufficient to gratify a mongoose's unquenchable desire for sport and exercise. So, as I say, we must confine ourselves chiefly to dogs and cats, with, perhaps, an occasional exception in favour of a parrot or a cockatoo. It is of

dogs that I now propose to speak. Nobody must suspect me of wishing to wrong cats and others if I reserve them for a later section.

☞ I read the other day in my favourite evening paper a notice of a booklet purporting to give an account of a variety of dog hitherto, it appeared, little known in England. I learnt that this dog was distantly related to the Newfoundland, that he was brown in colour, that his head was of certain dimensions, that his eyes were of a yellowish tint, that he stood so many inches at the shoulder, together with various notes as to the shape and size of his body and limbs. Beyond that there was nothing—nothing about his little tricks of manner and bearing, nothing about his bark, his courtesy, his genius for friendship and devotion—nothing, in short, about any of the glorious qualities that make up a dog's soul and endear him to his human colleague. It was a show-bench article, much like the lists of points with their percentages

of value which are issued by the various clubs formed to guard the physical characteristics of this or that particular breed of dog. Not but what, like Bob Jakin, I like a bit o' breed myself, but the essential thing about a dog is, not his pedigree, but his soul. My heart warms to the faithful clever mongrel no less than to his colleague of the untainted descent who has all the show-points to his credit. Who cares what was the pedigree of Pomero, the joy and solace of Landor's old age, or of Nero, "the little Cuban (Maltese? and otherwise mongrel) shock, mostly white," who shed a ray of sunshine on the household of the Carlyles, "poor little animal, so loyal, so loving, so naive and true with what dim intellect he had"? To me, too, there was granted in early youth a sort of Cuban-Maltese. He was purchased in Pau, a small but delicious ball of white wool, and on account of his infinitesimal size he was called by the name of Chang, a Chinese giant who was at that time exhibiting his star-y-point-

ing height to all who cared to pay for the spectacle. Given in derision, the name soon became inverted into mere truth, for our Chang rushed up the scale of growth with such swiftness that, before many months were out, he had become almost as tall as a collie. There never was a more affectionate or a cleverer dog. No "dim intellect" for him: he took his orders (and disobeyed them) in English and French and the *patois* of the Bearnese; and many a thing besides he knew. Poodles he detested, and always fought against them with surprising ferocity, looking upon them, I suppose, with his naturalized British prejudice, as canine kickshaws. When we left the Pyrenees for England he came with us, and being let out for exercise at some French station, he promptly lost himself. Then was seen the terrific spectacle of a distraught British lady's-maid running up and down the platform and appealing to everyone in these mysterious words: "*Avvy voo voo a petty sheen?*" Chang was, of course, found

eventually in the refreshment-room, where he had ingratiated himself with the lady behind the counter. He reached England without further adventure and lived to a great age.

¶ Then, too, there is Diogenes, the dog whom Paul Dombey remembered and whom Mr. Toots afterwards brought to Florence Dombey. What was the race of Diogenes? We know no more than we know what song the Sirens sang. He “was as ridiculous a dog as one could meet with on a summer’s day; a blundering, ill-favoured, clumsy, bullet-headed dog, continually acting on a wrong idea that there was an enemy in the neighbourhood, whom it was meritorious to bark at; and though he was far from good-tempered, and certainly was not clever, and had hair all over his eyes, and a comic nose, and an inconsistent tail, and a gruff voice; he was dearer to Florence, in virtue of that parting remembrance of him and that request that he might be taken care of, than the

most valuable and beautiful of his kind." Diogenes has, at any rate, one advantage over most pedigree dogs: he is immortal.

☞ As to the virtue of mongrels, then, I think, we can agree. "But," says the owner of the "yard-dog," with the air of one who is scoring an undeniable point, "you are trying to undog my dog and everybody else's. After all he is a dog, and not a human being, and Nature, who formed him to be an outdoor guardian, obviously did not intend him to be the questionable ornament of a room. Remember that your immortal Diogenes 'bounced into the room, dived under all the furniture, and wound a long iron chain, that dangled from his neck, round legs of chairs and tables . . . and went pell-mell at Towlinson, morally convinced that he was the enemy whom he had barked at round the corner all his life and never seen yet.' What have you to say to that? Is that a dog for a drawing-room?"

☞ Softly, my good friend, say I. As to Dio-

genes my answer is ready : “ He went to the window where Florence was sitting, looking on, rose up on his hind-legs, with his awkward forepaws on her shoulders, licked her face and hands, nestled his great head against her heart, and wagged his tail till he was tired. Finally, Diogenes coiled himself up at her feet and went to sleep.” And, in regard to the larger question of Nature’s intentions, I would have you show yourself a little less sure. Is it, after all, so manifestly clear that she intended *you* for a house? Is there not a suspicion that she formed you for an arboreal dwelling, and that it was only ambition and the decrease of tails that rescued you and all of us from a prehensile branch-to-branch existence? A little more modesty would better become you when your dog pleads for occasional admittance to your home. Heaven forbid that I should ask you to undog your dog. As a matter of fact you cannot do it, however much you may try. A dog will still be a dog: his tail will still wag and may sometimes sweep away a knick-

knack ; he will still turn round three times before lying down on your floor, just as his remote ancestors turned to beat down the long grass in which they slept ; he will still be four-legged and faithful and mute and eloquent ; and still, at times, he will publicly lick his paws into cleanliness. Yet there is in a dog so delightful a faculty of obedience and adaptability that, once released from his detested chain and transferred from the yard to the room, he will without an effort become courteous, refined, and unobtrusive, responding to your moods with a sympathy which is the very perfection of politeness. If you need silence while you read or write he will lie for hours without a movement. Give him a kind word and he will lift his heavy eyebrows and thump the floor with his grateful tail ; invite him to your side and he will come and lay his loyal head upon your knee ; bid him lie down and he will lie down again without a murmur to dream of glorious forays, the while he

*with inward yelp and restless forefoot plies
His function of the woodland.*

Æ Talk to him and he will never misunderstand you or give you a wrong answer. Your words, with a few exceptions, such as "dinner" or "drink" or "biscuits," mean nothing definite to him. He listens to your voice as you listen to music, finding in it consolation, hope, encouragement and exaltation, and satisfying all the vague longings of his soul in your profuse strains of unpremeditated art. Then rouse him for a walk or a romp and he is up and alert in a moment, his spirits raised at once to their highest pitch and all his sense of humour awake to make you mirth. Such is your companion during his all too brief life, joyous, humble, faithful and sincere, lending all his strength and wisdom and friendship to your service. And when the shadows close upon him how patiently will he bear his sufferings, how meekly will he beg you for relief. With his

last effort he will lick your hand, with his last look he will bid you good-bye, and his last sigh, as his heart ceases to beat, will be one of gratitude and love.

II. A GALLERY OF FRIENDS


AS I look back through the long avenue of memory I can see many shapes of dogs sporting in and out of the trees or pacing soberly enough by my side, a joyous and faithful company such as any dog-lover, I believe, can summon to his mind when the mood is on him. That, indeed, is one of the few compensations we have for the shortness of the lives of dogs. They become consecrated in memory and glorified in thought, living constantly in the hearts of the masters for whom they would gladly have given even the short term of life permitted by the fates. How they revelled and frolicked and spent themselves in our service, rejoicing in life because it gave them our society. And now

*Hi motus animorum atque haec certamina tanta
pulveris exigui jactu compressa quiescunt.*

☞ Let me record here as briefly as may be some of the deeds and qualities of these dogs of mine. If I do so with discretion I shall, I hope, escape the censure of Duke, the Great Dane, and Soo-ti, the Pekinese, those strangely assorted associates and friends who are now couched, each in his separate dignity, before my fire.

☞ Of Chang, the Cuban-Maltese, I have already spoken. That amiable alien had, however, been preceded in our home and our affections by Neptune, a Newfoundland of the true type, who was imported into this country from his place of origin in very early life. One of his younger brothers afterwards followed him and was given to Charles Dickens. Nep for some time, as I grieve to remember, lived in a stable-yard, attached to a kennel by a chain. At any rate these were his headquarters, and it became the custom

for the boy members of the family to visit him there ceremonially. We were small boys and the kennel was large. It was easy to creep into it and to pass some happy moments in intimate conversation with our black and shaggy friend, who welcomed us effusively and always treated us with a very high-bred courtesy while we shared his room. If it was possible we would then detach his chain without his knowledge and make a rush for the lawn. The result was always the same. There was a thunder of pursuing feet, a black head struck violently against a small boy's back, and a small boy's body, having hurtled through the air, thudded on the grass, to be rolled over and over and pranced upon and ruffled into a ruin of clothes by an enthusiastic dog. Poor old Neptune ! He had a mournful end, for he was bitten by a mad dog and had to be destroyed. Even now, at a distance of half a century, I cannot bear to think of our dreadful sorrow when, in spite of our passionate protests, that tragedy was

accomplished. It was our first experience of all that is irremediable in the death of a friend.  I must content myself, not as honouring them less, but as being limited in regard to space, with a bare mention of Shep, a beautiful Welsh collie, always ready to chase imaginary sheep over the commons of Cambridge or round the Squares of London, and of Buffles, a Skye, the frequent playmate of Wilkie Collins, whose bunch of keys he used to retrieve with eager iteration from all the corners and canopies of a drawing-room, of Buffles who, to the end of his long and honourable life, cherished the magnanimous delusion that, by the mere swiftness of his ridiculous legs, he could capture a pheasant in Hampshire or a sparrow in Pall Mall. I come now to Jack, the tawny and majestic chief of a long line of St. Bernards. Jack travelled as a youth from Switzerland to Cambridge, where he soon became a very active member of the First Trinity Boat Club. He involved himself willingly in the complex machinery for

the production and development of oarsmen, and was justly celebrated for the insatiable ardour with which he pursued the work of coaching. He had his own ideas of the proper pace for an eight-oared crew, preferring a humdrum paddle to the furious oarsmanship that secures bumps. Of this he sometimes showed his disapproval by attaching himself to the coat or sweater of his human colleague (if the latter happened to be on foot) or by leaping desperately at the supercilious nose of the tow-path horse. During the later and speedier stages of practice we were, therefore, compelled to leave him at the boathouse, where he superintended embarkations and landings and defied or disdained all rival crews. The restrictions of Cambridge in regard to dogs he accepted with great dignity. There was, indeed, a famous occasion when I saw him strolling nonchalantly across the Great Court of Trinity toward the Master's Lodge, then inhabited by Dr. Thompson, who knew about

dogs all that may be gathered from the editing of some of Plato's Dialogues. An alarmed, but adjuring, porter followed at a safe distance and Jack was eventually coaxed out. That, however, was an exception. At other times he did not fail to curl himself up in a corner outside the gateway and to wait there for his master without attempting a trespass. Many tried to lure him in, but the *ardor civium prava iuventium* had no effect upon him. Years afterwards when I took him to revisit Cambridge he remembered everything, and when I made to enter Trinity he trotted on in advance and lay down contentedly in the old corner.

☞ Removed from Cambridge he made his headquarters in a London house, to the mistress of which he attached himself with a devotion that drew part of its ardour, I am sure, from the monastic seclusion of his former life in a University. She, indeed, was formed by nature to be the friend of dogs. She humoured him to the top of his bent and

loved him. Yet he sometimes treated her without discretion, for he had a passion for carrying things in his mouth, and her parasols were usually sacrificed to his irrepressible requests. Once, when she returned from a drive he met her in the street, and, as she had no parasol, he seized the muff which hung from her neck and, prancing with delight, dragged her at a great pace head-first in at the front door, through the hall, and up the staircase, where I fortunately met and released her. His genius for protecting a woman was not exempt from a certain mischievous pleasure in teasing and bullying her.

☞ The same characteristic showed itself in Ben, a handsome and ingenious retriever of a later date, the dog

*who now without my aid
Hunts through the shadow-land, himself a
shade.*

☞ Whenever Ben's master had to spend a night from home, Ben immediately assumed

the close guardianship of a mistress whom at other times he treated with some neglect. He could not bear to lose her from view and paced from room to room, sometimes in the wake of her skirts, occasionally on them. The mere ghost of a footstep roused him to a growling devotion during which he suspected even the family butler of the darkest crimes. At about 10 o'clock P.M. he would get up and tug his lady's dress, afterwards walking to the door and scratching violently. If she paid no attention he tugged her dress with greater violence and nudged her repeatedly till she got up and opened the door, when he would run out, scamper up the stairs, and post himself on the landing. If she followed him all was well. If not he would set to work and bark till she submitted. Having thus forced her to obey him by coming to bed, he would lie down peacefully in the passage and go to sleep. When his master was at home he never attempted these proceedings, allowing 10 o'clock and 11

o'clock and even midnight to go by without a sign that he was aware of the flight of time or of the necessity for hustling good people into their beds. Left alone with his mistress, he became one of those dogs who, having accepted an office, 'comport themselves in it with a zeal suited to its responsible nature.

Æ Rollo, another St. Bernard, was also a protector, but with a difference. He found his chief interest and joy in children and the female guardians of children. While those of his own immediate circle were still quite young he guarded them with a jealous love, attending the perambulator closely, allowing the bigger ones to roll him about and tug his fur to their hearts' content, and following them from the garden to the nursery, always a little fearful lest harm should come to them. To the nurse who then looked after them he devoted himself with a singular and chivalrous affection, recognizing in her a colleague as kind and loyal as himself. No man's voice offering a run in the fields or a swim in the

river could ever tempt him from his infantry. When, in course of time, the nurse was succeeded by a French governess Rollo issued letters of naturalization to her at once and accepted her with enthusiasm and a transport of clumsy caresses. Yet his liking for perambulators remained unimpaired. On the distant appearance in the road of one of these vehicles he never failed to run up to it in order that he might examine and lick its terrified contents.

☞ Of Rufus, a spaniel, the archetype of fidelity, obstinacy and adoration, I have spoken elsewhere, celebrating his long life and his many virtues. I mention him here in order to recall a trait which is almost universal among dogs, but which in him had a peculiar strength. It was an acute agony to him to realize that his master's bag or portmanteau was being packed and that departure was in the air. He wandered about like a lost soul, and refused the most enticing biscuits. Now he would glue himself to my

side, and now, in a sudden frenzy, he would rush up the stairs into my room and lay himself firmly down in the partly packed portmanteau. Eviçted thence, he posted himself at the front door, waiting for me there in a pathetic attitude of guilty determination. Finally he had to be removed by force and shut up in a room, but even then I have sometimes known him to burst his bars and arrive, pursued by a boy, on the station platform as the train was moving out. How, indeed, is a dog to be assured that he will ever see his departing master again ?

Æ I cannot do more than indicate briefly the merits of Rouser, a rough-haired terrier, and Worry, an Irish terrier, friendly dogs, but not my own. Each of them had a distinctive character, but it was lost under the great heap of imaginary attributes which their fond master had raised about them. Rouser was an amiable dog, not gifted with an overmastering intelligence, who could always be made to believe that an army of rats lurked


under a sofa-cushion. Yet Rouser was praised to his innocent face for superhuman cleverness. His talents were loudly vaunted, and his solemn efforts to destroy a stocking or to tatter a hearthrug were attributed to the deep designs of genius rather than to an in-born capacity for mischief. Worry was the meekest and kindest dog in the world, and she spent much of her day lying curled up in comfortable places. We were asked to believe that Worry had an almost Satanic faculty for intrigue and wickedness, and when she was merely resting she was supposed to be scheming new plans of perversity. I am bound to say that the genuine characters of these dogs were never affected by all these imputations. They remained true dogs to the end.


☞ Here I must pause, though my list is by no means exhausted, for I have known and loved nearly every sort of dog : *Homo sum ; canini nihil a me alienum puto*. But what I have said is sufficient. Besides, Duke, the Great Dane, and Soo-ti, the Pekinese, who are sharing my

room with me, are now restless. They have been playing together, and twice the little fellow has picked a quarrel with his gigantic friend, has flown at him, caught him by the lip, and hung angrily suspended there. Each time the Dane has with infinite patience and gentleness freed himself from his impish tormentor. Now they have concentrated upon me. Duke is insinuating his nose under my arm ; Soo-ti is scratching my leg with his absurd fore-paws. "Come out," they say ; "come out into the open air." Well, well, let us go, then, and enjoy the day while there is yet time.

III. THE FRIENDLY DUCKLING

☞ I PLACE the story of the duckling here because there is something curiously dog-like about it. As to the precise origin of this duckling I am a little vague, but I incline to think that it was one of four or five who found on shaking off their shell that they had obtained a hen as a mother and a poultry yard as a nursery. I seem to remember that we first

saw it in the poultry yard a day or two after it had come to light. There was something peculiarly engaging about it, a spirit of forward and confiding boldness that prompted it rather to court than to avoid the tendered hand of a boy. At any rate, it was selected from the little flock and was carried, quite fearless, in a pocket to the house to be admired.  Once there it made itself at home directly. "This," it seemed to say, "is the imperial palace to which I belong. Hens' nests and fowl-runs are not for such as I. Human society is what I require, and here I intend to abide." It was divinely fluffy and yellow, and when, having been set down on a table, it waddled across with a roll so royal that it resembled a swagger, and cocked its funny little head and took stock of the company with a very knowing eye, there was a peal of laughter and delight from the children who were standing round. It was settled at once that it should not return to its foster-mother, but should be kept as a home pet, and that a roomy basket

with a lid should be provided for it as its own sacred dwelling-place. In this, on a bed of much flannel, it slept comfortably enough at night. During the day it lived partly in rooms, partly in the open air, and partly in pockets.  It became devotedly attached to all the children. We had known cats and dogs and had experience of their affection, but until we met this waddling little stranger we could never have believed that a mere spot of a duck could have wound itself round our hearts as this one did. If we put it down on the lawn or on a path it would follow—I was about to say, like a dog, but that would be an inadequate description. Certainly it was like a dog in its determination to be with us and not to lose us from view, but, on the other hand, its progress was slow and undeviating, though its gait was by no means solemn. It did not stop to investigate tufts of grass, nor did it attempt to express its joy by capering or by flank movements. It just followed, pee-eeping occasionally when we

got too far ahead and showing manifest delight when we stopped to allow it to catch us up, or when, its exercise being deemed to be duly accomplished, we took it up and replaced it in a pocket. Indoors, as I say, it had its basket, to which it was often thought safer to transfer it even in the daytime. So long as one of its young owners remained in the room it would lie snugly and happily in its mansion even if the lid were closed. But if we all went out it would immediately become conscious of its solitude and would cry piteously, until one of us returned and spoke to it, when it would cease its wailing and snuggle into its flannel once more. We tried this trick before all the servants and with any visitor who came to the house, and it never failed. As I look back upon it, it seems to me that we sported cruelly with affection and companionship.

On the second morning one of the boys had a brilliantly happy thought. "Why not," he said, "give it a swim in the big

bath?" The suggestion was rapturously received. A live duckling in a bath was obviously a better game than a fleet of tin fish—the sort that has a stick of steel projecting from the snout—drawn by means of a magnet on a hesitating and frequently interrupted course. So up we dashed into the paternal dressing-room, carrying our favourite with us. The bath was quickly filled and the duckling was promptly launched on the surface of the water. It proved to be a most intrepid navigator. It chattered with delight, dabbling enthusiastically in the water, flinging showers over its body, standing on its innocent head, and expressing its joy by a hundred pretty antics. It was great sport to keep moving from one end of the bath to the other and to watch it paddling desperately after us. For speed against the clock over that particular course of five feet or so I am sure its record still holds good. There was never another competitor, and house and bath have now vanished from the earth.

☞ In the meantime myths and legends, having the duckling for their nucleus, began to spread in the neighbourhood. The cottagers thought there was magic in it and were disposed to shake their heads. The gardener's wife said "she'd a-seen no end of ducklings in her time, ah, and wrung the necks of a tidy few ducks, pretty dears, and a very tasty dish they made with sage and onions to flavour 'em. Some made their apple sauce one way and some made it another. She herself used only the best apples. If you couldn't get them it was safest to go without. But this little bit of a duckling was more like a Christian than anything she'd ever set eyes on, follered you about and talked to you. She wouldn't wonder if you found it writing in copybooks next, but for herself she'd never held with all this eddication, no, and never would. All she hoped was there wouldn't be a judgment for taking a dumb thing out o' nature like that." The Vicar, on the other hand, was jocose in a manner befitting a classical scholar. We

met him in the lane when we were giving our little companion a stroll, and asked him if he thought it would turn into a drake and have a curled feather in its tail. The Vicar would have none of it. "No, no," he said, "that's impossible. *Dux femina facti*, you know, ha, ha!" We thanked him and retired. So matters went on for about a fortnight, the duckling showing a slight increase in size, but still maintaining its yellow fluffiness, its capacity for friendship and its strange intelligence. Then there came the sad and fatal night which put an end to this little idyll. The duckling, as I have said, slept in a basket, and at night this was conveyed with its gentle occupant to the bedroom of the two bigger boys. Turn and turn about each of them had the right to have the basket on the floor by his bedside. On this particular night it was the turn of the eldest boy. Before he turned in it seemed to him that his little friend was not so comfortable as usual in the basket. He thought it might be cold, and told his

brother he would take it into his own bed for warmth.

“All right,” said the younger. “Bags I for to-morrow night then.” So it was arranged, and the duckling, nothing loth, was transferred to the bed, crept close up to the boy’s body and went to sleep very happily.

In the morning the younger boy woke first. “Halloa,” he shouted across the room, “let’s have the duckling out and play with it.”

“Right,” said the elder, and he put his hand under the bedclothes.

There was a pause. “What’s the matter?” called the younger. “Can’t you find it?”

“Oh, Fred,” said the elder, “it’s dead, poor little beggar. I must have been lying on it in my sleep. What *shall* we do about it?”

There was nothing to be done. The duckling had died of mere excess of kindness and affection.

IV. THE PURRERS

☞ WHY should the cat so often be praised with an apology, and why, when the dog is in question, should he be exalted at the expense of the cat? I protest I do not understand this habit of mind. There is, for instance, M. Maeterlinck. In the midst of his delightful and touching story of his little dog Pelléas—"tant d'ardeur à aimer, de courage à comprendre, tant de joie affectueuse, tant de bons regards dévoués qui se tournaient vers l'homme pour demander son aide contre d'injustes et d'inexplicables souffrances"—in the midst of this story he turns aside to give the cat a cuff: "Je ne parle pas du chat pour qui nous ne sommes qu'une proie trop grosse et immangeable, du chat féroce dont l'oblique dédain ne nous tolère que comme des parasites encombrants dans notre propre logis. Lui du moins nous maudit dans son cœur mystérieux." *Lui!* M. Maeterlinck is wrong *en détail* as well as *en gros*. In spite of the French language, the cat ought not to be spoken of generically as a

male. There are, no doubt, particular Toms, but the general cat is of the feminine gender, and it is by the feminine pronoun that I shall refer to her. And on the main point the judgment is monstrously wild and violent. As a first step in the process of disproof I submitted this painful passage to Fluffy, who has shared my home for seventeen years, still keeping a gallant bearing against the attacks of time and producing kittens with regularity and dispatch. "Fluffy," I said, "are you ferocious?" She opened her pink mouth, but made no sound, and then (being on a gravel path) turned over on her back and asked for a caress. "Fluffy," I continued, "where is your oblique disdain?" She drew my hand down gently and clawlessly with her front paws. "Fluffy," I concluded, "why do you think of us as encumbering parasites and curse us in your mysterious heart?" She rose, arched her back, and rubbed herself, smiling and purring, against my leg. The answer was complete, a

delicate and reticent expression of sincere affection.

☞ This is not to deny the assertion that a cat is sometimes fierce and cruel. The bird maintains it and the mouse confirms it. But it must be remembered that the charge usually brought against her is one of special ferocity distinguishing her, let us say, from the dog. What is to be said, then, in mitigation of the conduct of a terrier with a rat, of a greyhound with a hare, or of a foxhound (or, for the matter of that, of a man) with a fox? Here is fierceness on a large scale. Dinah, the gentlest and mildest Welsh terrier that ever begged pardon for existing, used to spend hours at a rat-hole. She killed, not for food, but for mere pleasure. Rufus, my spaniel, the exemplar of kindness, had a particular dislike (it would have been wrong to call it a distaste) for hedgehogs. On a summer's night he used to track them on the lawn, and I have known him to bring three of these inoffensive beasts, each as big as his head, one after another into

the drawing-room in his bleeding mouth. That he wished to destroy them is certain, but their bristles saved them and they were all restored to the bushes and liberty. On such matters there can be no argument. It is best to admit that our beloved dog and our dear cat both have primal impulses, ancient necessities of rapine, and wild desires which we can sometimes soften and direct, but can never utterly abolish. It must be enough for us that they have come from their world into ours to lay their love and their companionship at our feet.

☞ With what a dignity and grace and discretion does a cat make her offer. She tells you plainly it is there for the taking, but she would scorn to force it upon you, for she has her reserve and is proud of her independence. "If you like me," she seems to say, "and are willing to respect me, count me your faithful cat. I shall make few claims on you. An armchair, a cushion, a saucer of milk, a plate of fish will satisfy my wants. I shall never

plague you to take me out for exercise, having my own irregular hours for taking the air by myself. Sometimes I will follow you round the garden, but never slavishly, for little moving things attract me and odds and ends of toilet have to be performed. But I am at my best inside your room." And in this the cat is right. Outside, no doubt, she may have an opportunity to display her courage. Some blundering bully of a dog may see her, and imagining a facile prey or building hope upon the supposed imminence of her swift retreat, he makes at her in a sudden onset. Then she, surprised, but not discomfited, awaits his coming, her lips drawn back, her eyes gleaming defiance, her ears flattened down, and her body tense. He, as he rushes, beholds her standing fast, and at the last he leaps aside to right or left, either pretending that there is no cat or trying to persuade others that some pressing business, newly discovered, has drawn him off his direct course. And in another moment the cat is up a tree, hurling satire

down at her baffled enemy. And the strange thing is that, within the house, these two may be on terms of easy friendship, lying on the same rug and even lapping from the same dish.

Æ To be sure it was on a garden seat that Swinburne was sitting when he addressed his beautiful lines to a cat :

*Stately, kindly, lordly friend,
Condescend
Here to sit by me, and turn
Glorious eyes that smile and burn,
Golden eyes, love's lustrous meed,
On the golden page I read.*

*All your wondrous wealth of hair,
Dark and fair,
Silken-shaggy, soft and bright
As the clouds and beams of night,
Pays my reverent hand's caress
Back with friendlier gentleness.*

*Dogs may fawn on all and some
As they come ;
You, a friend of loftier mind,
Answer friends alone in kind.
Just your foot upon my hand
Softly bids it understand.*

☞ This is the very perfection of sympathy, a quality not too common amongst our poets when they refer to cats. Gray, for instance, when the pensive Selima was drowned in a tub of gold-fishes, described the tragedy with an elaborate facetiousness, and found in it an opportunity for cold moralizing. Ever since the far-off day when I was ordered to translate them into Latin elegiacs I have detested these heartless stanzas. Why, moreover, should Selima's death be used to enforce the lesson (see the last line) that not all that glisters is gold ? Selima was not out for gold. She wanted fish, and the dullest dace would have lured her to her fatal fall equally well. Gray should have known better, for he had

resided many years at Cambridge, where, as at Oxford, cats are held in high honour and are promoted to great positions. Sir Frederick Pollock, who has been Fellow of a College at both Universities, has described how his election to a Fellowship was confirmed by the "Senior Fellow," who

*Arose and sniffed the stranger's shoes
With critic nose, as ancients use
To judge mankind aright.*

*I—for 'twas I who tell the tale—
Conscious of fortune's trembling scale,
Awaited the decree ;
But Tom had judged : " He loves our race,"
And, as to his ancestral place,
He leapt upon my knee.*

Alas ! the Senior Fellow is dead, but his memory is kept alive :

*He seems, while catless we confer,
To join with faint Elysian purr,
A tutelary friend.*

Evidently Sir Frederick is a "catanthropist"—the word was invented by Wilkie Collins. I find it used by him in a letter written to my mother in 1866 :

☞ "Oh, I wanted you so at Rome—in the Protestant Cemetery—don't start ! No ghosts—only a cat. I went to show my friend Pigott the grave of the illustrious Shelley. Approaching the resting-place of the divine poet in a bright sunlight, the finest black Tom you ever saw discovered at an incredible distance that a catanthropist had entered the cemetery—rushed up at a gallop with his tail at right-angles to his spine—turned over on his back with his four paws in the air, and said in the language of cats : ' Shelley be hanged ! Come and tickle me ! ' I stooped and tickled him. We were both profoundly affected."

☞ I have wandered far from the statement that a cat is at her best in a room, and yet I cling to it. For in a room a cat confers and diffuses comfort in the very act of accepting

it. Place her on a cushion with her front paws either folded and tucked beneath her or kneading her soft couch with a luxurious movement, and she will make, not merely a corner, but a whole library cosy. Her presence can ennoble a hovel and invest a semi-detached cottage with an appearance of feudal and heraldic repose. If you call her she blinks and purrs ; if you leave her to herself she is willing to pass hours in serene abstraction from the business of the world, conscious only of her own comfortable decorative quality and of her self-respecting dignity. Sometimes she will play, but only if she wishes to amuse herself, differing in this from a dog, who will often play in order that he may amuse you. Her spirits are calm rather than high, and boisterous fun has no attraction for her. It seems to her that she ought to guard your household gods (being herself one of them) in silence rather than with a tempestuous vigilance. Yet her sympathy and her friendship never fail those in whom she has learnt

to place her confidence, and her response to affection is quick and warm and sincere. She is something of a conservative and suspects change. Introduce a new piece of furniture into her room, and she must investigate it from top to bottom and on all sides before she can even pretend to be reconciled to it. Open a cupboard or pull out a drawer, and her serenity disappears. She has to explore the innermost recesses of this new appearance delicately but thoroughly. So it was with Cowper's cat :

*A drawer impending o'er the rest,
Half-open in the topmost chest,
Of depth enough, and none to spare,
Invited her to slumber there.*

The unconscious chambermaid shut her in, and it was not until the second night that the kind poet heard and released his inquisitive companion.

æ Yet, though I hold that cats are best in a house, I am far from agreeing with those who declare that the attachment of cats is always

to houses and never to human beings. I could cite many cases, but I will content myself with that of Venus.

☞ Venus was a tortoiseshell waif who appeared one morning, Heaven knows whence, in our garden. She announced her presence to me by pitiful mewings, and then, in answer to a call, she revealed herself, a thin, woe-begone figure with a patchy coat and a long, stiff, attenuated tail. As soon as she had made up her mind about me her friendship and devotion began to gush forth. She rubbed herself round and round my legs ; she showed herself, as a little boy once said of another cat, extraordinarily fond of the human hand. She followed me about the garden, purring madly whenever I touched her ; she came with me toward the house and accepted a bowl of milk with rapture. Thenceforward she was my intimate and affectionate friend. Yet it was only by slow degrees that I was able to coax her into the house, and her attitude in it was never one of complete ease.

She was a wild free thing and could not brook the confinement of four walls. Where she slept I never discovered, but after breakfast I always found her waiting for me (and milk) near the library window. When she was about to become a mother a comfortable box was prepared for her in a shed, and it was hoped that she would use it for the interesting event. However, she preferred a thick patch of bushes in the garden, and there one morning we discovered her, supremely happy, with four plain kittens. Twice they were transferred to the box in the shed, and twice Venus bore them back to the bushes one by one. While she was carrying a kitten on one of these maternal excursions I met her. She hesitated a moment, and then deposited the kitten at my feet and mewed. The invitation was too obvious to be neglected. I took up her little burden, and carried it for her to her leafy retreat. After that she was allowed to have her way, and we rigged up an old umbrella to protect her and her young barbarians

from rain. Never in the whole course of our friendship did she suffer herself to become a strictly domestic cat. She loved and trusted human beings, but she did not like their homes.

§ Here I must end my plea for the cat. She is often misunderstood, and often scurvily treated by those who are dull enough to reject her affection. Those who accept her offer know that she is

*Vanquished not, but reconciled,
Free from curb of aught above
Save the lovely curb of love.*

And, thus curbed, she too is not without a spark divine.

V. THE DREAM OF SYLVESTER

§ WHEN the learned and saintly Sylvester—not the famous monk of Kieff, whose name is recorded in history, but a distant and much younger cousin of the same name, who had dedicated many years

of a long life to the service of the poor and the distressed amongst whom it was his pleasure to live—when, as I say, Sylvester, broken with toil and worn out with sickness, lay a-dying, he had a dream which is thus related in the ancient chronicles :

✠ It seemed to Sylvester that he was drawing near to the end of a journey. As he turned his head he could see the dark and gloomy mountain region through which he had passed. The crags, he remembered, had been hard to climb ; the paths, winding along the edges of terrific precipices, were slippery and narrow, and, footsore and weary though he was, he thanked God humbly for keeping him safe and sound in the midst of these manifold dangers. The road on which he was now walking was broad and easy, and but a little distance ahead he saw the airy towers and gleaming palaces and the tall and shady trees of the great city which he knew somehow, though he could not tell its name, to be

his destination. "Heaven be praised for all its mercies," said Sylvester. "I have but a short way to make, and then I shall be at rest."

☛ So saying the good Sylvester trudged cheerily forward, making light of his past sufferings in the hope of what was to come. On a sudden, as he walked, he heard behind him a clattering of heavy hoofs, and in a moment a great grey horse, rough in coat and mane and tufted about his feet with long hair, stood beside him and whinnied for joy. So friendly, indeed, seemed the horse that Sylvester could not forbear to pat his honest neck, and as he did so a light broke into his mind, for he observed that there was a nick in one of the horse's ears, as though some one had clipped a little triangle out of it. "Surely," he said aloud, "this is my old horse Justin, whom I have mourned and missed these ten years past."

☛ At this the grey whinnied even more loudly, and Sylvester stroked and patted him and kissed him on the nose, and in return the

horse nuzzled about him with every sign of affection.

“Alas,” said Sylvester, “there was always a slice of apple or a lump of sugar for thee, but now, I fear, there is nothing—nay, by my father’s sword, there *is* something,” and so saying he brought out from the capacious pocket of his cloak an ancient carrot and thrust it into the mouth of Justin, who munched it with great relish and content.

“But tell me,” said Sylvester, when the carrot had been swallowed, “how art thou here alive, for I remember how death came upon thee and that I myself saw thee lying still and cold in the little meadow?”

At this the horse grew grave. “Yes,” he said (for in dreams as in fables it is granted to beasts to talk), “it is true that I stretched myself for a long sleep and that I was transferred. It was grief and pain to leave thee, but so it was ordained. All these years I have waited for thy coming, and now I behold thee again, my master, and it may be, if God

so wills it, that we shall not be parted any more."

☞ "I pray it may be so," said Sylvester, and together they prepared to go on their road. But before they had moved a step there came a hurried scampering of feet, and a large brown dog rushed up to Sylvester, hurled himself almost into his arms, and began gambolling round him, now racing swiftly in a circle, now leaping against his chest and again bounding against his legs, until at last he stood quivering by Sylvester's side and barked, nay shouted, with pure delight.

☞ "Wonder on wonder," said Sylvester, "and blessing upon blessing ; for this is Ambrose, my faithful dog, whom, since death claimed him five years back, I never thought to see again. Stand still, Ambrose, and let me gaze into thine eyes, and give me the old look that my heart remembers."

☞ And now the dog in his turn spoke to his master. "Wearily have the hours gone, O my master," he said, "since I came hither.

Yet I have waited patiently, knowing that thou too wouldst come. And now it is granted to me to see thee and I have my recompense."

☞ "And I mine," said Sylvester. "But time is passing and we must press on, for I would fain reach the city before nightfall."

☞ "There is no nightfall here," said a new voice close beside him. "It is always day."

☞ To Sylvester it appeared that there was some discontent in the tones, and he looked carefully for the speaker. At last he saw a black furry face peeping out of a bush by the roadside, and realized that it was a cat who had addressed him.

☞ "Cause the horse and the dog to stand back for a moment," said the cat, "for I desire to assure myself that thou art in truth my old companion."

☞ Justin and Ambrose did as they were desired, and the cat advanced cautiously from her hiding-place till she reached Sylvester, against whose legs she rubbed herself, purring ecstatically the while.

“This,” said Sylvester, “is none other than Barbara, the dear friend of my middle age, the comfortable inmate of my home. Barbara, what brings thee here, for to thee, too, death came many years ago? I had known thee anywhere by thy purr and thy four white paws and the love thou showest me.”

“What brings me here?” said Barbara. “Merely my own desire and the convenience of the bushes by which the road is bordered. It was open to me to stay away, but after all I honour friendship and——” Here she broke off, for a leaf impelled by the breeze had drifted past her and she had darted after it.

Now, as Sylvester stood there wondering and thanking Heaven for its goodness, he heard a fluttering of little wings, and a small bird, dropping as it were from the sky, circled round his head and perched upon his shoulder. It pecked gently at his cheek and lips, ruffled its breast-feathers, and piped a song of happiness.

“How now?” said Sylvester. “Is my little bull-finch Anselm returned to me? Surely thy tender body was long since laid beneath the roses, but now, behold, it is given to me to stroke thy glossy black head once more and to take pleasure in thy pretty ways. And now, indeed, I remember the tuneful notes which used to shed a balm upon my spirit. Anselm, canst thou still sing the Song of the Exile?”

“That I can,” said Anselm. “How should I forget aught that gave thee pleasure?” and raising his head he let the notes stream from his parted beak.

“It is the same,” said Sylvester, “the very same,” and so, with Anselm on his shoulder, and Barbara zigzagging from side to side (but never losing him from view), and Justin and Ambrose following faithfully at his heels, our kind Sylvester went forward again along the road, until at last they all came to a stop before the great gate of gold which is set in the outer wall of the city.

“Knock at the gate, master,” said the dog.

“Nay,” said Sylvester, “who am I that I should knock? I am unworthy.”

Then Ambrose began to bark, and Justin neighed, and Anselm piped the Song of the Exile, and Barbara, too, made a noise after her own kind, all of them desiring that their friend Sylvester might be allowed to enter; but still the great gate remained closed.

And at last a Voice came from within, saying, “Who stands without?” and Sylvester made answer: “It is I, Sylvester, the humblest of God’s creatures. I have no merit of my own, but I have toiled much, and now would rest for a little in order that I may the better toil again.”

At this there was a pause, and then the Voice spoke again:

“What have these who stand with thee to say on thy behalf?”

“He took me in,” said the horse, “when I was faint and wounded. He cared for me

and fed me and healed me, and I was happy to serve him. Never a whip did he use to me, but only kind and cheerful words."

☞ Next the dog spoke: "He rescued me from death. He gave me meat and drink and kindness and friendship. Life would have been useless to me without him."

☞ "Aye," said Sylvester, "but I beat thee once, and many a time since has my heart been sore for thinking upon it."

☞ "Pooh," said Ambrose, "a touch with a little twig. That was no proper beating for one who had stolen a bone. It was for me to earn thy pardon for not having been sufficiently punished," and the dog came closer to Sylvester and pressed his muzzle into his master's hand.

☞ "He asked no service of me," said the cat, "but gave and took companionship and kindness. He spread his old cloak for me by the side of the fire; he scratched me behind the ears; he tended my kittens and made my life comfortable."

☞ Last of all the bull-finch spoke in a high clear voice :

☞ “He took pleasure in my singing. He praised my feathers, and gave me seeds and water. The door of my cage stood always open and I could flit where I willed. He protected and befriended me, as he did all those who suffered and had need.”

☞ Now Sylvester was ashamed to hear himself thus praised beyond what he thought his merit, and he was about to protest and to set matters right, when the Voice from within spoke again. “Admit Sylvester,” it said, “and let these who have spoken for him enter with him.”

☞ At this the great gate flew back and a loud sound of bells broke forth. But just as this company of friends was about to pass in, the dream ended and Sylvester for the last time awoke.

☞ He was lying on his little truckle-bed, and sitting beside him he saw his pupils, Ivan and Nicholas.

☞ “Is it morning yet?” he said.

☞ “Yes, master,” said Ivan. “Dost thou not hear the morning bells?”

☞ “My strength is far spent,” said Sylvester, “and my time is very short. I would fain see the faces of my friends once more.”

☞ “Master,” said Nicholas, “we cannot let them in, for they are too many. They have been waiting outside this hour or more.”

☞ “Then do thou and Ivan,” said Sylvester, “bear me out in my bed, for I must say a word to them ere I depart.”

☞ So Nicholas and Ivan bore him forth, and the people when they saw him fell on their knees and begged his blessing. Then Sylvester raised his hand and blessed them, and, having done this, he asked them to listen, and he told them his dream as I have here set it down. And when he had done, one said to another, “Surely our dear master wanders in his mind,” and another said, “It is a pretty tale, but why is it told to us?” But others understood and were silent. And when they

looked at Sylvester again they saw that there was a smile upon his face, and then the smile passed, and his head fell back, and he was dead. ~~So~~ And since that day in the region where he lived and taught there have been few but have been good to their beasts, sharing with them in thankfulness the common toil and the common blessings of the world. And from their beasts they have learnt how to be good to one another, bearing themselves humbly and loyally in the sight of Him who ordained life in its various forms, allotting to one a furry coat, to another wings, to a third the gift of speech, and to all a heart where love can make its home.



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